



Chairman Ajit Pai
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street SW,
Washington, DC 20554

October 19, 2017

Dear Chairman Pai,

I am writing today in response to the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC) Public Notice which, among other things, considers changes to the E-Rate program. Before delving into my response to the proposed changes, I want to thank the FCC for your continued support for the E-Rate program and for the critical programmatic and policy changes the commission adopted in 2014. The E-Rate program provides critical discounts to assist schools to obtain affordable telecommunications and internet access.

As an Education Service Agency (ESA) in the state of Alaska, SERRC has the unique opportunity to witness firsthand the inequity of services in some of our most needy schools. It is most critical that all of our schools, especially in rural remote locations be brought up to current standards to address equitable access to learning opportunities for our students. E-Rate has proven to be an essential program and has been successful in its aim to connect schools and libraries to the internet. A very important component of bringing our schools to current technological standards, is the ability to apply for Internal Connections with Category 2 funds. For so many years, these funds were not available, even to schools most in need. Especially with the 5-year phase out of voice services, it has become even more imperative for schools and libraries to be able to upgrade their current infrastructure to meet the academic needs of their students.

The E-Rate program is a program succeeding in its mission. As the FCC moves forward with this public notice, it is prudent to remain focused on the fact that E-Rate is a program that works. Any changes to the E-Rate program should be focused on expanding a successful program that has yet to reach its full potential and ensuring the FCC remains a good steward of the changes adopted 2014, allowing those changes to progress and play out as intended.

E-Rate played a critical role in the rapid and significant expansion of connectivity in schools, and the 2014 modernization was a much needed update to ensure more schools and libraries are connected to broadband. The E-Rate's investment in Category 2 Wi-Fi and internal connections funding is extremely valuable and could not be replaced by school, district or state funds.

When the Category 2 funds became available as of 2015, many of Alaska's schools applied for these funds in that very first year. These funds were incredibly beneficial as so much of the infrastructure that was in use was well past "end of life" and failing on a consistent basis. Without this desperately needed upgrade to equipment, our students would not have had the much needed connectivity and access to learning in support of their academic success.

In closing, I reiterate my continued and strong support for and reliance upon the E-Rate program for being able to access and afford the high-speed connectivity that is so central to our students' learning. Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kela Halfmann". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "K" and "H".

Kela Halfmann

E-Rate Coordinator

SERRC – Alaska's Educational Resource Center